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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001373

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TAGS: [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [ECIN](#) [IZ](#) [PREL](#) [SENV](#) [SY](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY WANTS TIGRIS-EUPHRATES BASIN AGREEMENT

Classified by Ambassador Eric Edelman for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: MFA officials say Turkey wants to begin a dialogue with Syria and Iraq, leading to a comprehensive water sharing/management agreement for the Tigris-Euphrates basin, part of an effort by the Turkish government to contribute to stability in the region. They say that in the coming year, decisions by Turkey and Iraq on water usage could lock in sharp increases in water demand, making any future agreement increasingly difficult. The Foreign Ministry wants the U.S. to play a role in this process and has asked Washington to consider sending a delegation to Ankara to discuss a way forward. We think this is an important opportunity and urge Washington to consider the Turks' offer to consult. End Summary.

2. (U) Regional Environment Officer has had a series of meetings with officials in the Foreign Ministry and other GOT agencies to discuss Turkey's desire to begin the process of tri-partite cooperation on the Tigris-Euphrates basin. Deputy Undersecretary Kilic said that the MFA wants to explore the willingness of Syria and Iraq to discuss a single agreement to cover water issues for the entire Tigris and Euphrates Basin. At numerous international fora, Turkish officials have presented the government's desire to reach an accord. Turkey's presentation to the 48th Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Istanbul, 15-19 November 2002, stated "Turkey is eager to find ways of reaching a basis for cooperation on the Tigris and Euphrates which will strengthen regional peace and improve the quality of life of the peoples of the three countries."

3. (C) The Chief of the Foreign Ministry's Transboundary Water Department, Mithat Rende, said the MFA thinks that the departure of Hussein and improving relations with Syria present an opportunity to begin a dialogue. However, he is concerned that time may be growing short; important decisions are being made in Iraq that bear directly on future water use -- increasing Iraq's agricultural production, restoration of the marshes, and reconstruction of Iraq's system of dams and canals.

4. (C) Rende explained that Turkey wants to begin a dialogue that would lead to direct talks with Iraq and Syria. Rende said the MFA understands that this will be a long and sometimes difficult process. Past efforts to reach agreement have failed, mostly because of political suspicions and tensions. Syria and Iraq have frequently accused Ankara of using its control of the Tigris and Euphrates headwaters as a weapon.

5. (U) Rende said the first steps in the process would need to focus on non-controversial issues to build trust among the parties. Turkey wants to begin the dialogue with data sharing -- to exchange and compile accurate and comparable data on past and projected water flows from Turkey, water demand projections in all three countries, information on water quality, and information on water infrastructure, such as dams, treatment plants and irrigation systems. Comment: Embassy believes that the data-sharing process alone could bring real benefits, especially to Iraq, which will need accurate water data in its reconstruction and development planning.

6. (SBU) Turkey has developed a simple set of goals for a comprehensive agreement.

-- Single Basin. Turkey insists that any progress toward fruitful cooperation must be based on the principle that the two rivers be considered a single water basin.

-- Water rights. Turkey affirms that all riparian states have a right to the water resources of the Tigris and Euphrates. However, this does not mean that each riparian state has a claim to an equal share of the total water resources.

-- Optimal Usage. The benefits of the water resources must be shared in an equitable and efficient (optimal) manner. In other words, with rights come responsibilities. Turkish officials argue that any agreement will fail without fundamental agreement on the need to make optimal use of the water. This will require a high degree of cooperation, data sharing and transparency to work.

17. (U) The Turks argue that they are using the most advanced engineering and technical know-how to make optimal use of the water Turkey takes from the Tigris and Euphrates) this includes optimal planning of reservoirs, careful selection of land to be irrigated and introduction of modern, efficient irrigation techniques. They argue that Syria and Iraq have not.

18. (SBU) Syria: Turkey is hopeful that Syria can become a serious and cooperative partner, according to Rende. The January visit of President Assad, although light on substance, did indicate a willingness on both sides to improve relations. Prior to Assad's visit, Turkey's Ambassador to Damascus told Syrian journalists that recent improvements in relations with Syria should open the door for cooperation on water issues.

19. (U) Iraq: Rende said Hussein's regime had been the main obstacle in Turkey's previous attempts to reach a tri-lateral accord, and he was encouraged by Water Resources Minister Latif Rashid's statements last fall that Iraq would like to reach an agreement.

110. (U) Turkey thinks that it can offer real benefits to its southern neighbors as part of an agreement. Turkey has devoted significant resources to water projects in the Tigris and Euphrates headwaters under the Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) and says it is eager to share its expertise and experience. Turkey's GAP Administration has been working with its sister organization in Syria, the General Organization for Land Development (GOLD) and says it would like to help Iraq restore its water infrastructure. Turkey's dams already provide benefits downstream, reducing seasonal variations, which reduces flooding risk and increases supply reliability. Turkish officials at the State Hydraulics Works (DSI) claim that Turkish dams are efficient (higher elevation and deeper) and suggested that an agreement would reduce the need for expensive and less efficient dam projects in Syria and Iraq.

111. (C) On the other hand, lack of an agreement could lead to problems in the future as the riparian states proceed with agricultural and economic development projects. So far, Turkey's Southeast Anatolia Project (GAP) has focused on dams to exploit the hydropower potential of the Tigris and Euphrates, which has had only a minor effect on water quality and supply downstream. However, GAP's ambitious irrigation blueprint and plans for economic and industrial development will certainly raise concerns in Syria and Iraq about future water supply and deteriorating water quality. For example, the GAP Master Plan calls for a nearly ten-fold increase of farm land irrigated from the Tigris and Euphrates -- from 187,000 hectares to 1.7 million hectares.

Next Steps

112. (C) While we recognize many factors and issues are at play here, Embassy thinks that Turkey's proposal is worth considering. Turkey's desire to play a constructive role in Iraq's reconstruction and contribute to regional stability, coupled with readiness in Iraq and improved relations with Syria, offers a peculiar (and perhaps limited) opportunity. Delay could make any future agreement increasingly difficult as Turkey and Iraq lock in ambitious development plans that will require much more water.

113. (C) The Turkish initiative could offer an opportunity to achieve agreement on a long-standing, thorny issue in a region that has been among the most tense in the world. Moreover, it would fulfill the U.S. objective to encourage Turkey to contribute to regional stability and the reconstruction of Iraq. This is especially important, in our view, for Turkey, coming after the difficult decisions regarding Turkey's contribution to peacekeeping in Iraq and prior to the June 2004 NATO Summit and President's visit to Turkey.

14. (SBU) Ankara would be interested in views of CPA and Embassy Damascus about Iraqi and Syrian willingness and capability to initiate talks. We also recommend that Washington consider the Turkish initiative, especially its invitation for a U.S. team to visit Ankara to discuss the issue.

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